

ANIMAL INSTINCTS, EMOTIONS MIRROR FEELINGS OF HUMANS

7/22/97

I risk certain criticism from all sides with this last in a series of columns on animals. The anti-hunters will think me cruel and unfeeling, while the sporting fraternity thinks that I am growing soft in my old age. To some extent they are both right.

Animals possess many of the same instincts and emotions as humans. The more one comes to learn this, the harder it becomes to deal with them in our pursuits, be they occupational or recreational.

The power of reason is not a trait that I once attributed to all animals. An old mother fox taught me that they can, in fact, reason. She crossed a back road in front of me with what I took to be one of her kits in her mouth.

I was able to park and position myself to intercept her path. I was curious as to her load and where she was headed with it.

Detecting me, she deposited her burden on the ground and fled. I discovered four chipmunks in a tangled pile. Leaving them undisturbed, I located her destination, a den under the roots of a large hemlock on a riverbank.

I was struck by the realization that she was astute enough to gather more than one victim at a time and thus conserve her energies in what had to be an ever-widening hunting area.

I have since witnessed the same behavior from a mother fisher. I was also startled to discover a baby porcupine in its nest not three feet from the fox den.

A mother beaver gave me a real insight into the emotions possible from an animal. The experience left me troubled and sad enough so that until now I have shared it with few others than my wife.

I caught a small kit beaver in a conibear trap where it had expired quickly with no sign of distress. I was not disturbed by the incident until I passed by the lodge located on the bank of the pond. The whimpering and crying of what had to be its mother was audible as I passed by.

The memory further troubled me when I arrived home and greeted my three children. I was able to rationalize the event somewhat by acknowledging that the money, from the pelts helped provide for my own young.

I once dropped a large ten-point buck with a 125-yard shot as he raced across a raise clearing called Cahnas Farm.

Congratulating myself on the shot, my mood suddenly changed when the doe he was chasing turned and ran back to him. Stamping her front foot in agitation, she urged him to follow her.

Sadder yet was witnessing a hunting buddy drop a Canada goose that had escaped a run over our decoys and circled back for her fallen mate.

To make a long story short, I view hunting and trapping as necessary evils that ultimately benefit both wildlife and humans.

The plight of the African elephant is an example of extreme measures that may save them from extinction. If this premise is true, some must have the courage and backbone to carry it out.